

Template for Usability Test Tasks

Make one copy of this table for each task you create.

Task #, <Task Name>

Goal/Output:	
Inputs:	
Assumptions :	
Steps:	
Time for expert:	
Instructions for user:	
Notes:	

Instructions for Use

- **Task # and name.** Give each task a brief descriptive name and a number. The name helps you remember what its purpose is, and the numbers are useful in usability testing because you can ask the observers things such as, “Shall we skip 3 this time and go right to 4?” without discussing the content of the tasks in front of the users.
- **Goal/outputs.** What will users have accomplished when they’re done with the task? Is there a tangible output? How will they know the task is complete? What might the users do to be sure?
- **Inputs.** List all the information or resources—tangible and intangible—that a user would need to complete this task. Examples include, a valid log-in, business policies, physical objects such as a textbook or a credit card, file names, and so on. Real users may have some of this information in their heads—in your usability task you might have to provide this information. For example, a network administrator probably knows the network configuration by heart, but for your task you’d need to create a network schematic with relevant details, such as server names and IP addresses.
- **Assumptions.** Assumptions are the conditions and prerequisites that are in place at the start of the task. The assumptions depend on what you want to learn from the task. For example, if a task explores how users recover from an error caused by a duplicate record, your assumptions include the condition(s) that cause the error to occur, such as, “An employee with the same name already exists in the database.”
- **Steps.** Write down the steps you expect the user will go through in completing the task. This helps you identify the prototype pieces that you’ll need to create. Writing down the expected steps can also be helpful if there will be observers who aren’t as familiar with the interface as you are. Keep the steps mostly at a screen level—no need to list every field on the order form, just say “order form.” Some tasks have multiple paths that lead to success, so jot down

any variations, such as “Search OR navigate to lawn & garden page.” Put optional steps in parentheses, such as (Review privacy policy).

- **Time estimate for expert.** Estimate how long it would take an expert (someone on the core team) to complete the task. Ignore any time needed for the system to do its processing and focus on the time spent entering data and clicking buttons. Some tasks, such as composing an email, require time for thinking or creative effort, so allow time for that. In deciding how many tasks you’ll need to fill your test time, multiply this estimate by a factor appropriate for your interface (typically, a number between 3 and 10).
- **Instructions for users.** Don’t write the instructions for the users when you’re filling in the rest of the template. Although task design works well as a group activity, writing the instructions can be done by one person after you’ve drafted your set of tasks.
- **Notes.** The notes section might have several types of information, including the reasons why you created the task, how you’ll conduct it, specific things to watch for, and questions to ask users after the task is complete. Information to include in the notes varies depending on what’s being tested. Write down whatever information you think will be useful to have on hand during the usability tests, and give copies of the completed task templates to usability test observers.